

Letter of support by Kathleen G. Novak
Re: Committee Bill No. 5144: An Act Concerning an Appropriation to Expand
the Nurturing Families Network
February 26, 2009

My name is Kathleen G. Novak and I am a Licensed Clinical Social Worker and former supervisor and program manager of the Hartford Healthy Families CT site at VNA Healthcare (now Nurturing Families Network.) I would like you to imagine all of the poor families in our state taking advantage of one of the most innovative programs in PREVENTING child abuse and neglect. As a human services provider, I'd like you to imagine our state leading the way with programs that help first time poor families develop the skills and knowledge they need to be the best parents they can possibly be. Imagine these families recognizing their own inherent abilities because they have home visitors that care about them, that see them every single week, that show them that they are important and that knowledge is power when it comes to helping their own children become healthy, happy individuals.

With Committee Bill No. 5144: An Act Concerning an Appropriation to Expand the Nurturing Families Network, this will indeed become reality. With this bill, all single parents below or at the federal poverty level will have the opportunity to take advantage of the Nurturing Families Network home visitation program. Since most families served are at this level, it seems prudent that the Children's Trust Fund now expands to include all families who may be at risk for child abuse and neglect. With their excellent record of decreasing the Department of Children and Families reports made and substantiated on Nurturing Families Network families, this highly valued agency within our state is uniquely situated to deliver outstanding service to all poor families. The Center for Social Research at the University of Hartford has repeatedly shown that the CTF is a trusted agency in delivering on their promises to children and families. Poverty is one of the chief factors in child abuse and neglect cases, and the CTF does outstanding work at recognizing this factor when they create programs to deal with the social problem of abuse and neglect. This is evidenced by their "Families with Acute Problems" policy that tightens practices around social problems of poor mental health, substance abuse and domestic violence. In fact, the Nurturing Families Network Hartford sites are embarking on a new initiative for first-time mothers who have major depression, offering in-home Cognitive Behavioral Therapy. This is an exciting development, and one which I personally know is greatly needed amongst this population.

Karen Foley-Schain and her dedicated staff will be able to reduce the cost of providing "treatment" care to our poorest new families with the approval of this new bill. As you know, the cost of prevention is far less than the cost of dealing with families already in the DCF system. I applaud this proposal by The Select Committee on Children and highly endorse this proposed expansion in securing the futures of our children NOW, under the care of the Children's Trust Fund instead of LATER, under the care of The Department of Children and Families. Thank you.